



Feldmann, M. (2020). The Routledge international handbook of European social transformations: edited by Peeter Vihalemm, Anu Masso and Signe Opermann, Routledge, 2018, 320 pp., \$176.00, ISBN 978-1-4724-7794-1. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 51(2), 293-295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2020.1751482>

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Link to published version (if available):  
[10.1080/01629778.2020.1751482](https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2020.1751482)

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**The Routledge International Handbook of European Social Transformations (*Routledge International Handbooks*), edited by Peeter Vihalemm, Anu Masso, Signe Opermann, Routledge, 2018, 320 pp., \$176.00, ISBN 9781472477941**

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**Book review submitted to the Journal of Baltic Studies**

The end of communist rule across Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union ushered in a period of dramatic social, political and economic transformations. As about three decades have passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is an opportune time to take stock of these transformations and to analyze their causes and consequences. The *Routledge International Handbook of European Social Transformations*, edited by Peeter Vihalemm, Anu Masso, and Signe Opermann, is an ambitious attempt to examine these processes, and most key issue areas are covered here. Compared to other contributions to these debates, this volume is distinctive in at least four respects.

First, the volume devotes great attention to theoretical debates associated with these transformations. This is a central element of the substantial and very nuanced introductory chapter by Lauristin et al., which situates the volume in relation to key debates in classical and contemporary social theory. Similarly, the chapter by Kollmorgen provides a novel synthesis and analysis of various theoretical approaches to the transformations after the end of communism. There are chapters on some influential concepts taken from social theory, such as space-time compression (Warf) or refraction (Mikser and Goodson), which empirically minded social scientists have tended either to take for granted or not to pay much attention to. In this sense the volume should facilitate dialogue between scholars focused on Central and Eastern Europe and other parts of social sciences.

Second, the volume also devotes considerable attention to methodology, partly in conjunction with theoretical debates, but also as a separate concern. In particular, the chapters by Norkus and by Rončević et al. contain various methodological reflections, with a heavy emphasis on fuzzy set analysis, which is an important and arguably often underrated tool of social science research. The chapter by Mikser and Goodson also considers narrative approaches. Some more traditional approaches, such as those drawing on ethnography, comparative historical analysis, case studies, and large-N statistical analyses, receive less attention, although they have probably been the most widely used approaches. This may reflect the ambition of the volume to identify new agendas and not merely to survey what has already been done. Nevertheless, more detailed reflection on the utility of the most widely used approaches to understanding transformations could have been valuable, not least to highlight to what extent the study of transformations necessarily requires new methodological approaches.

Third, the volume seeks to relate the debate about post-communist transformations to broader processes of change in Europe, including globalization, Europeanization and other processes of socio-economic transformation, such as mediatization (Krotz), migration (Faist et al.) and environmental challenges (Preisendörfer). While the attempt to relate post-communist transformations to broader patterns of change in Europe is very ambitious and innovative, and there are some interesting observations about these issues, this volume does not fully achieve this goal. The main reason for this is that the question of comparability could have been

problematized more carefully. It would have been interesting to hear a bit more about the extent to which post-communist transformations are both similar to other transformations and unique. This might have required unpacking the concept of transformations further and surveying some of the developments in other parts of Europe more systematically. Such an agenda would probably have gone beyond the scope of what is already a very substantial volume, but it would have helped to clarify the relative distinctiveness of Central and East European transformations and the generalizability of key arguments about transformations.

Fourth, the volume is in many ways an Estonian intervention into these debates. All the three editors are Estonian, and almost half of the chapters are (co-)authored by Estonian scholars. This contribution to a high-profile international volume is a testament to the creativity and achievements of Estonian social science in recent decades, and it will make the volume particularly interesting to many readers of this journal. While the volume also demonstrates a laudable attempt to include contributions from scholars based in various other Central and East European countries alongside some Western European and North American scholars, not every part of the former communist world is represented here. Perhaps this is also one of the reasons why the volume speaks less to transformations in some other parts of the former communist bloc, including the Balkans and parts of the former Soviet Union. When the volume refers to such cases, the assessments tend to discount such cases as not undergoing genuine transformations or as being examples of morphostasis (p.11). Yet even in the kinds of countries such comments refer to, it could be argued that much has changed over the past thirty years. For example, the continuity of political elites in countries like Kazakhstan does not imply that the cumulative effects of economic transformation or processes of nation-building have been insignificant. Even if the transformations in Kazakhstan might be quite different from the Baltic experience or indeed from developments across most of Central and Eastern Europe, a volume focusing on general processes of transformation could have been expected to devote more attention to the full range of transformations in the former communist world, if only to highlight how this diversity defies any predictions of a uniform transition paradigm leading to common outcomes (p. 35). This might also have required paying more attention to topics, such as informal institutions or state- and nation-building.

Overall, the four distinctive characteristics highlighted in this review ensure that this is an agenda-setting volume, in that it not only surveys the state of the art, but also opens up a wide range of questions and issues for future research. The time is clearly ripe for these kinds of theoretical and methodological reflections and for asking hard questions about how to study the post-communist world and what we can learn from these transformations. If the era of post-communist reform is over, how should the ongoing transformations in this part of the world be studied and conceptualized? As in the case of most great books, the questions this volume asks and the agenda it identifies are at least as important as the answers it provides.

Given its emphasis on theory and methodology, the volume presumes a very good understanding of key empirical and historical developments. Therefore, this volume is probably more useful to the seasoned scholar than to the novice, though undergraduate and graduate students may wish to consult individual chapters as supplementary reading to deepen their understanding of particular topics and of key debates surrounding the transformations in Central and Eastern Europe. In summary, this is a highly distinctive and thought-provoking volume and an important milestone in the study of transformations in Central and Eastern

Europe, including the Baltic States. Serious scholars of Central and Eastern Europe will want to engage with this volume, and libraries will want to include it in their collections.

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